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ABSTRACT

In a discussion of video technology and language learning, video is defined as any form of language-teaching (LT) material that can be shown on a television monitor, excluding interactive video. The first part of the paper presents a possible pedagogical framework for video in language learning. The role of video is: (1) to provide a source of language input for students; and (2) to offer a way of developing learner competencies in particular language skills. Video documents can show the interrelationship of spoken and interactive discourse in stimulating and entertaining ways, and television screens compel attention. The second section examines the question of access to video materials in view of some of the pedagogical considerations. The discussion focuses on access to four types of LT video materials: video materials specially designed for LT, semi-pedagogic LT video materials, authentic off-air documents edited for LT, and authentic off-air documents unedited for LT. It is concluded that video is an effective vehicle for developing second language acquisition by providing input and by organizing opportunities for a wide range of communicative activities in the various language skills. Contains 31 references. (LB)

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# Issues in the use of video technology in the language classroom

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## Introduction

The definition of video taken for the purposes of this paper is broad: it refers to any form of language-teaching material that can be shown on a television monitor. It covers, therefore, not just teaching materials specifically designed for commercial distribution on videocassette, but also programmes designed to be broadcast either on traditional terrestrial channels or *via* satellite, as well as materials which may originally be broadcast but are then distributed commercially on videocassette in the form of multi-media language-teaching materials. This working definition of video excludes reference to language-teaching materials which interlink keyboard and screen, i.e. interactive video, not because these are of lesser importance in language teaching pedagogy, but because it would not be possible to deal with their implications in the space available.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first section, the main part of the paper, contains an outline of a possible pedagogical framework for video in language learning, and the second section examines the question of access to video materials in view of some of the pedagogical considerations outlined.

## A possible pedagogical framework for video in language teaching

Looking at developments in second language acquisition theory in recent years, the role of video can be summarized in two ways. Firstly, video documents should be seen as a source of language input for students - essentially a means of providing them with extensive exposure to instances of the target language. In this context, input is taken to mean instances of the

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target language to which students are exposed by means of listening or reading texts. Secondly, video documents can be used as a way of developing learner competence in particular language skills. Included here are not just the skills of viewing or listening comprehension, which tend to be the language skills most frequently associated with video, but also those of speaking, writing and even reading.

Let us first examine the role of video as a source of language input. Recent studies in acquisition theory have shown that instructing pupils in a foreign language, i.e. requiring of them that they master rules and have a conscious understanding of how language functions, does not play as crucial a role in successful language learning as was once thought. Pupils can also acquire a great deal of language through subconscious processes, basically using the faculties that enabled them to learn their mother tongue in the first place. Such subconscious processes are likely to be best activated, according to acquisition theorists such as Krashen (1982, 1985) and Krashen & Terrell (1983), both by arranging that learning takes place in language-rich, natural environments and by providing the right kind of source material.

In view of these theoretical findings - which I believe also correspond with the classroom experience of the majority of practitioners - one of the main tasks facing language teachers today is to seek out materials which provide good opportunities for pupils to acquire or, to use the appropriate non-technical term, "pick up" the language. A lot of work has been done in identifying the characteristics good input documents should have (Krashen 1982). These characteristics do not describe the documents *per se* but the kind of criteria that should apply when selecting documents for use in class. Documents which allow input are likely to be strong on affective appeal; they are chosen because of their interest value to the learners rather than the type of structure or vocabulary they contain; they are not grammatically sequenced; at the same time, they are not likely to be much beyond the level of the pupils; finally, they provide lots of contextual support to facilitate comprehension.

Given these characteristics, it is easy to see how video can be such a good source of input material, arguably one of the best there is. It is useful, at this point, to consider in detail some of the main reasons why video documents are such a good source of language input.

Firstly, in a way that other media forms cannot, video documents can show us something near the integrality of spoken and interactive discourse



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and they can do this in extremely stimulating and entertaining ways. By comparison, and for reasons which are self-evident, audio documents are much more limited. On video, all the elements in communication can be illustrated, including relationships, reactions, moods, place, personae, etc. Though the statement has become something of a cliché, it does bear repeating: video brings the foreign country into the classroom and places language in context. Above all, however, video demonstrates the close interrelationship between aural and visual channels in communication and ensures that we have access to the full range of non-verbal and extralinguistic sources of meaning which are so important in interaction (Riley 1985).

Secondly, television screens compel attention whether at home, in public or in class. Once student attention is engaged and held by a particular video extract, language will be acquired. Research has shown that retention of material shown on television is related to what is called "depth of processing", that is, the extent to which the viewer is prepared to invest mental effort in the viewing (Craik & Lockhart 1972, Salomon 1984). The effort invested is in turn related to the degree of meaningfulness for the viewer of what is shown on screen. This proposition applies to general learning from television, but in my view it may apply to language learning as well. When the right video document is shown at the right moment to a class that is ready to receive it, pupils can "pick up" whole chunks of language seemingly without effort. In some cases the acquisition process can be so complete that there is no evidence of an interlanguage stage during which learners try to master the elements. It is important to note too that this language is not memorized. It is acquired simply as a result of viewing and without any intervention by the teacher. The language is taken in and disappears, only to resurface, like an underground river, in most unexpected but entirely appropriate contexts.

The impression should not be created that every piece of video works in this way, nor should pretentious claims be made for video. The extent to which the language will be acquired will depend on the impact and quality of a particular document. Clearly, the average evening news bulletin will not have the same televisual impact as, let us say, a striking and technically well-executed television advertisement, where extensive cinematic techniques are deployed to produce maximum lasting effect in a few seconds' viewing. In the case of the former, maybe only the headlines or a few key words will be absorbed, and this with possibly short-term retention. In the

case of a short piece of video with strong visual and emotional appeal, however, an entire discourse pattern may be assimilated and retained over a longer period of time.

This language assimilation process has been observed with sections of the *Kaléidoscope* video kit (Ruane et al. 1987, 1989) now being used by second-level teachers of French in Irish schools. In sequences found to be particularly appealing and interesting by pupils, chunks of language were acquired very effectively and re-emerged, sometimes after considerable time had elapsed, in a range of different contexts. This happened to the astonishment of the class-teachers, who realized that they had actually taken no active part in their pupils' learning process and had certainly not formally instructed (or drilled) their pupils in the language points in question. Their role had been simply to create the appropriate conditions for viewing and to ensure that the sequence selected was one that the learners would find enjoyable at a particular time and that there were matching viewing guides to help them follow what was going on.

Lastly, there is the association between video and entertainment which also contributes enormously to motivation and good relations in a classroom, what Krashen (1982) calls the low-anxiety, tension-free atmosphere. Most learners are positively predisposed to television and believe that it can contribute to their learning. As an illustration of this, it is interesting to observe the numbers of pupils at second level who pressurize their teachers to "show us a video" or the number of adult learners who, finding they have to study language on their own, actively seek out video materials believing that these will somehow make the whole process easier and certainly more pleasurable. Though for some teachers (particularly those working in formal education at second level) using entertaining video materials in class can cause concern about the breakdown of discipline and control, in general the amusement and relaxation which follow can contribute to motivation and should be harnessed for learning purposes. The real problem with this is finding the right kind of material, material that will be perceived to be interesting and entertaining. If learners have positive attitudes to television, they also have high expectations and demand high (enjoyment!) standards in what they watch. They want to be stimulated, motivated and entertained, they want material resembling the kind of television that they will watch themselves for leisure. This is something we will come to later.

In summary, therefore, video documents can show language in context,

They can engage attention, and they have strong motivational features. For th[illegible] as well as for other reasons, they are an excellent form of input and can cont[illegible]bute to subconscious acquisition of language.

But watching video must also be an active process. Regardless of how much language is absorbed by looking at a high-quality input source, to use video documents in this way, for passive viewing only, is to exploit only a limited part of their potential. It is also necessary to ensure that learners engage in a range of activities which encourage or require them to use the language for purposes of real communication. Viewed in this way video can become an excellent means for pupils to develop language skills and, as I said earlier, not just one of the language skills but all of them, listening, speaking, writing and even reading.

Applied linguists such as Allwright (1984) Ellis (1985), Littlewood (1981, 1984), and Prabhu (1987), place a high value on the role of communicative activities in acquiring language. They see a more reduced role for input in the acquisition process. In varying degrees and with varying nuances, the claim of all these theorists is that pupils acquire language when they have to use it in communicative situations. As Little et al. say in their recent work *Authentic Texts in Foreign Language Teaching* (1988), we promote learning not just for but through communicating. The overall aim must be to ensure that learners are occupied in understanding and/or conveying messages. Language forms are important inasmuch as they enable this to happen. Methodologically speaking, this implies a different approach to the use of traditional grammatical exercises, which require the application of particular rules in phrasal or sentence units independent of context. An approach based on communicative activities calls for an emphasis on problem-solving, task completion, interrelating information and inferencing - not in relation to linguistic forms but in relation to semantic content. Learner output in the target language, in this case, is likely to take the form of completed grids, short reports, presentations of results, flow-charts, surveys, etc. Syllabuses for this kind of approach are likely to take the form not of grammatical or even notional-functional points, but of an inventory of activities, procedures or tasks (Prabhu 1987).

Arising from this, the question is whether video can provide good resource material on which to base activities and tasks for communication. I believe it can, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, because video documents are first-rate "trigger" documents. If learners are to interact in class, if they are to engage in meaning-related

activities, in problem-solving, task completion, they have to have reasons to talk and topics to talk and write about. Carefully chosen video documents can provide powerful images to create the appropriate stimuli: images that will involve the viewers, stimulate, puzzle, captivate, irritate, raise questions, cause confusion, anger, enthrall. All of these responses are the stuff of good interaction in class and can be exploited for language learning purposes through a range of communicative activities. Since video documents are generally viewed by the whole class together, the impact is likely to be all the more powerful.

Secondly, it does not take long to provide the stimulus. Even the briefest sequence can provoke reaction and response, and very complex messages can be communicated very rapidly. Very short sequences, sometimes as short as one or two minutes, can produce teaching material to keep a class going for quite a while - even over a few days - depending on what exercises are used. In recent years, possibly coinciding with recent trends in language teaching, there has been a very definite shift towards using shorter and shorter sequences. A survey on the use of video published by MacKnight (1983) showed that the average lesson time occupied by video was twenty to forty minutes with advanced and intermediate groups, between ten and twenty minutes with elementary groups, and long sequences of forty-five minutes to one hour were not uncommon. Short sequences of five minutes or less were found to be rare, however. A similar survey done to-day (though I do not know whether one has been done) on the use of video within an acquisition perspective would be likely to find very different results. The current tendency is to work with extremely short video sequences or alternatively not to show a video in its original entirety but to take short extracts which are then edited in the form of video clips. As stated above, video sequences can fulfil their function of making an impact in an extremely brief period of time.

Thirdly, an extremely rich range of exercise types can be generated from on-screen material. All the activities which can be used with audio and reading texts can be applied to video, and there are others that are specific to the medium. As video texts are an immensely flexible resource, the same programme can be used for several purposes (making sure, of course, that the document is not flogged to death by playing it over and over again): to practice gist comprehension, to elicit detailed comprehension, to stimulate active oral work, to develop vocabulary, to introduce grammar points etc. (Hill 1984). In doing the various pre-, while-, and post-viewing exercises,

pupils have a constant reference point on the screen which provides them not only with extensive contextual support, but also with the "linguistic capital" they need for production.

Let us turn now to an examination of how the various language skills can be promoted through using video. As I have already argued, all four language skills can be developed with video, and this in any order, as there is no fixed order in which these skills should be taken. Sometimes it may be appropriate to begin work on a video extract with viewing comprehension, sometimes a reading text may precede the video extract, sometimes writing activities may follow directly from viewing, and so on. I shall now examine possible roles for video by looking at examples taken from each of the four skills of language teaching.

It is appropriate to begin with reading because using video in conjunction with reading texts may not seem an obvious use of the medium. The main role for video here is to provide the contextual framework for reading texts. A common and self-evident observation in much that has been written recently about reading in a foreign language is that pupils will find it easier to read material that they have some prior knowledge of and that they have an interest in. As some commentators (Grellet 1981, Alderson 1984) have put it, a high interest level in a text's content can overcome the expected "linguistic difficulty" of a text or the reader's lack of familiarity with a topic. If we can succeed in interesting the students in the content of a text, they are likely to find it more interesting and therefore more accessible. What better way of introducing a reading text than to show a parallel text on video, a short excerpt dealing with the theme or topic contained in the reading text and ideally containing similar vocabulary and linguistic structures?

With regard to writing, let me illustrate the role video can play by taking an example of a fairly standard writing task in a second-level syllabus (my example is taken from a recent French examination at Leaving Certificate, Ordinary Level): "Your name is Seán or Síle de Barra. You live in Kilrush. You forgot your address book at the Youth Hostel in Morlaix in France. Write to the Youth Hostel Director and ask him to send it on to you." Now at the best of times, writing is a difficult activity: it is a solitary process, and the writer has to put him/herself into the mind of both the initiator and the recipient of the message. Writing in a foreign language makes this task all the more demanding. Contextual supports help considerably (Widdowson1983). Had these been supplied in this case, the writer would have had



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background information about, firstly, Seán or Síle de Barra, about the youth hostel, about Morlaix, about how the address book came to be lost in the first place. The task would have been easier for the pupil and the final result would no doubt have been better. This is where video comes in: as in the case of reading, it can supply context. It is much easier to write about people you have actually seen and about whom you have formed some impressions, to write about places that you can imagine yourself as having visited, to describe events that you have actually witnessed rather than imagine you have witnessed. Not only will you find it easier, it is also highly likely that you will write better because there is more first-hand experience in what you are writing about.

The opportunities to develop speaking activities from video are so numerous that it is difficult to do them anything but partial justice here. It is probably in this area that video is most useful as it can, as stated earlier, provide much-needed stimuli for speaking in class. Just one example of how the screen can contribute to the development of speech is provided in this next example. We are all familiar with how the engineering of information, opinion and other types of "gaps" in class can contribute to interaction. When pupils do not share the same view of and reaction to an event, topic, situation or person, there is the basis for dispute, disagreement and therefore discussion (Klippel 1984). The creation of such information and opinion "gaps" in class is made much easier by the use of the screen, where complex, ambiguous life-situations can be illustrated in detail.

Finally, the development of listening or viewing comprehension can be achieved very successfully by means of video. As stated earlier, this is one of the more obvious uses for the medium as learners need to be exposed to natural speech in context (Ur 1981). Through video, not only will they find sample materials which will approximate to what they find in real life, but they will also be in a position to help develop their comprehension skills by drawing on all the extra-linguistic, non-vocal elements present in any communicative situation.

Developing the four language skills through video implies an overall interaction structure in class which is illustrated by Figure 1. In this diagram all the elements in the interaction process are represented - the screen, the learner as individual or member of a group, the teacher, and supporting authentic documents. The nature of the interrelationship is also represented: the main relationship is between the screen and the students as the screen is the first source of the interaction; all of the other elements

## *Video In LT: Organisation of the Learning Process*

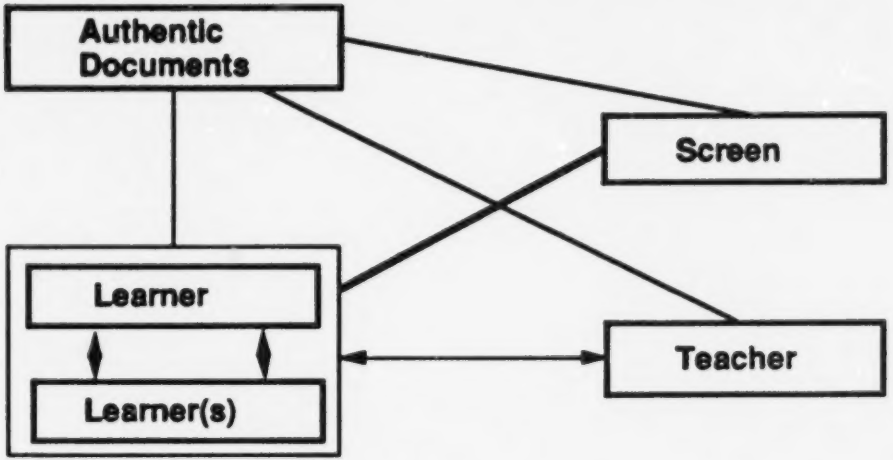


Figure 1

4. Aux quatre coins du monde, on utilise le français pour diverses raisons. Dans le cas de chacun/e des personnes suivantes, essayez d'imaginer trois situations (personnelles et professionnelles) dans lesquelles ils auraient à se servir du français. A l'aide de la carte et de l'autre document de la section "Pour en savoir plus...", remplissez les cadres ci-dessous. (Travail de groupe).

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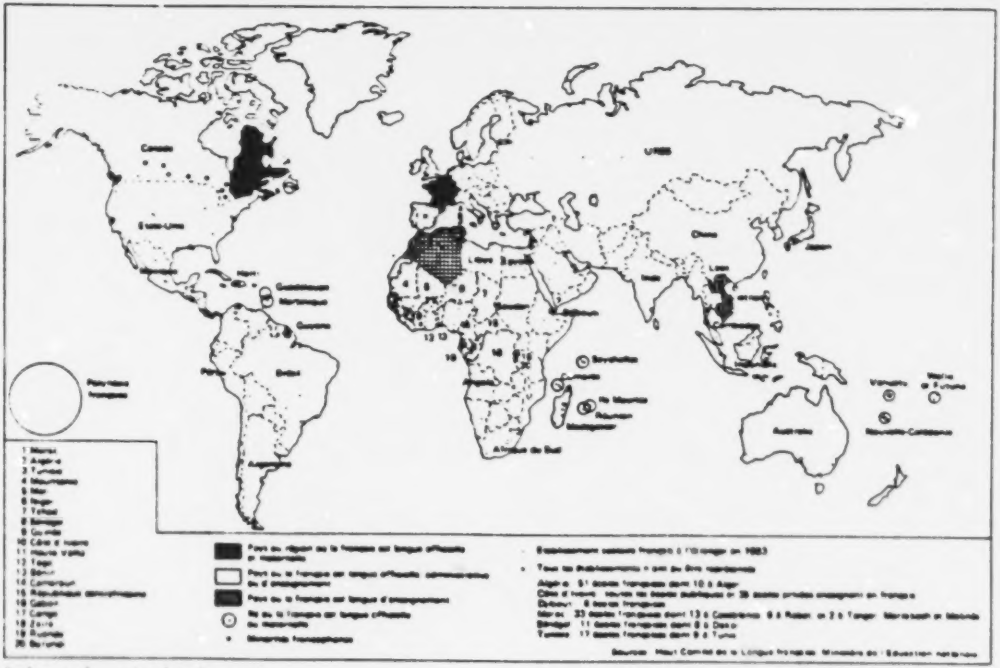
**Figure 2**



La langue française dans le monde

Figure 3



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interlink, however - screen with authentic documents, teacher with pupils, pupils with authentic documents, and so on. From this, it is clear that the on-screen stimulus, though central, is but one of several participating elements. Other elements to be emphasized in particular would be the learners' role in the whole process.

By way of conclusion to this section on a pedagogical framework for video, the following is an illustration of how this process - interconnecting video, authentic documents, tasks, teacher and students working individually or in groups - might work in practice. The example is drawn from a sequence in *Kaléidoscope* (Ruane et al. 1987, 1989). The video clip consists of a number of young people, of different nationalities, describing their own language skills and giving their reasons for learning French. The input source on video and in parallel reading texts provides the learners with exposure to the language they need to talk about the topic in question. The learners are then given a task which consists of working out possible professional and personal reasons certain individuals, living in different parts of the world, might have to speak French (see Figure 2). The task is done in groups, the pupils refer to a map (see Figure 3) illustrating the French-speaking world to find out the information they require, and results are written up and then reported back to the class as a whole.

### Access to video technology and software

Given the importance of video as a means of developing language acquisition and providing opportunities for interaction in class, it is vital that source material be made available to both teachers and pupils. This introduces the second issue in this paper, the question of access to and availability of video documents in view of the pedagogical perspectives outlined. The problem will be approached in two ways: firstly, by considering in a general way what kind of video documents should be used for language teaching; secondly, by looking at how video documents might be categorized in view of the fact that the aim is the promotion of an acquisition-based approach to video.

Firstly, let me consider the kind of video that should be used in class. Video documents used in language class should resemble the kind of television material learners are used to viewing at home. This basically means using authentic documents recorded off-air and high-quality specially-made pedagogic materials. In this context, it is interesting to note an

## Classification of LT Video Materials

- Video materials specially designed for LT
- Semi-pedagogic LT video material
- Authentic off-air documents edited for LT
- Authentic off-air documents unedited for LT

Figure 4

observation of Tony Bates (1984) of the Open University to the effect that "good television" does not necessarily lead to effective learning. I see difficulties in applying this view to language learning from television, particularly in an acquisition-based framework. Whereas the role of television in teaching certain subject matters is generally to present content or to explain or reinforce points of information, in language teaching it is to act as an input source and as a stimulus for speech. This means that television must be "good": the material must be interesting, relevant and entertaining, it must be strong on appeal and able to capture attention. Authentic documents must be carefully selected and custom-designed materials must be of a high quality. In particular, this imposes certain technical requirements - productions must be of broadcast or near-broadcast standard; there must be no mismatch between sound and visual elements; there must be interesting camera angles, smooth editing, effective use of music, sound effects, graphics and animation.

Turning now to a classification of video materials in an acquisition-based perspective, what kind of materials are available and which of them are the most suitable? To answer this question it is necessary to classify the range of video materials that are available. There is probably no one satisfactory way of doing this, although several commentators have looked at the problem (Geddes & Sturtridge 1982, McGovern 1983, Allan 1985, Compte 1985, Lancien 1986). Possible ways of classifying video documents are by looking at the target users, delivery systems (whether designed for broadcast, satellite or video), greater and lesser authenticity, etc. An interesting way of classifying them was proposed recently by Thierry Lancien at a seminar in Dublin. His method consisted of categorizing the degree to which the video documents had been didacticized. Figure 4 contains a modification of the Lancien classification and provides some comments on the possible use of each category in an acquisition-based approach to video in language teaching.

#### Video materials specially designed for language teaching

This category covers video materials designed as "complete courses" for teaching foreign languages, i.e. materials which offer structured, graded progressions based on defined language syllabuses, many of them grammatical. Whilst in some of these courses the pedagogic dimension will not necessarily be apparent, in many of them the didactic element will be so marked that it gets in the way of the content of the programme. Sometimes



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the programme-maker or designer even takes over the role of the teacher, establishing one-to-one relationships with the viewer. Course materials of this kind are generally for broadcast use and may also be distributed on video in the form of multi-media packages with supporting students' and viewers' books.

Where these materials have been designed to the highest technical and artistic standards with outstanding scriptwriters and directors - as in the case of many of the productions of the BBC and ITV - these courses can be quite successful, mainly because they are entertaining television. Where the appropriate pedagogic/entertainment balance has not been found - and this is the case in most of the course materials in this category - these documents are highly contrived and will not hold the attention of even the most captive audiences. As they lack this vital "entertainment dimension", they will not serve as good input for acquisition. Unfortunately, there are a lot of video documents of this type and despite their many weaknesses, they are in high commercial demand, if not in this country, in many others.

**Semi-pedagogic video materials**

These are sometimes in the form of course material. More generally, however, they are ancillary resource documents. In these programmes there is ostensibly no pedagogical or linguistic constraint, the material is unscripted (even if edited), no progression is devised, and the materials are not normally expected to match particular syllabuses. The material is selected because of its relevance and intrinsic, motivational content. For this reason it is very suitable as input. The pedagogical dimension comes from the fact that pedagogues have chosen the exercises or suggested the kinds of topics that might be covered on television. Examples of the kinds of materials here are *Zoom*, *Lyon à la Une*, cartoon materials, and the video material *Kaléidoscope*. These documents are not pedagogically constrained, though there is a pedagogical conception and slant. The absence of a pedagogical or linguistic constraint in making these materials means that they have a high degree of spontaneity and freshness; they can be very entertaining and very different from those of the first category mentioned above. They can also, in my view, serve as good sources of language input.

**Authentic off-air documents edited for language teaching**

These documents are generally recorded off-air, modified and then used as input for work on the various language skills. An example of

materials in this category is *BBC Newsbrief*, which consists of a once-monthly scripted and edited videotape of a selection of BBC television news items which have appeared internationally. The materials are accompanied by a study pack.

Another extremely interesting example of materials in this category is the Oxford Olympus Language Teaching Project. This also consists of extracts from television news bulletins, recorded off-air and then grouped into multi-media packs comprising edited video clips and also accompanying audio-clips, on-screen teachers' notes, commentaries and printed material. What is interesting about this particular project, however, is the delivery mechanism for both the video and the support material. The on-screen material, including video and sound, will be distributed via the European Space Agency's educational satellite, Olympus, which was launched in the autumn of 1989. Once it begins scheduled broadcasting, both individuals and institutions will be able to access it, though they will need special receivers. Most of the printed material, on the other hand, including exercises, teachers' notes, etc., will be distributed by teletext, with users hopefully able to transfer the material to their own personal computers for further processing. There are to be fifty packs a year, five in each of the languages included in the scheme, and the packs will be designed by groups of teachers working on the materials with a language group leader. I quote this as an example of the way video technology is moving into multi-media systems using advanced technology.

These kinds of materials are very good for acquisition mainly because they are of high quality technically, they present material that is relevant, levels can be controlled, and the supports for the learners are considerable. From the teacher's point of view these materials also have the advantage that they come ready prepared. A pre-selection is made and there is a pedagogical apparatus to support both teachers and pupils. These materials have the disadvantage, however, that they cannot be fully up to date and cannot therefore fully meet pupils' needs. In addition, there is the problem of accessing this material either because one is dependent on the scheduling arrangements of the television stations or because, in the case of satellites, there are difficulties in receiving the material.

#### Authentic off-air documents unedited for language teaching

Finally, video documents which are recorded off-air but are not processed for pedagogic purposes. The material in this category comprises

extracts from films, documentaries, current affairs programmes and chat-shows, and again provides good material for acquisition. The material can be got from the traditional terrestrial channels or from satellites. It is generally recorded by individuals or groups of teachers in schools, mainly because they want to get up-to-date material, offer pupils programmes they want to see, and vary the sources. As they are raw extracts from longer programmes there is no pedagogical editing.

In many ways these materials are possibly best of all for acquisition - because they are likely to be up to the minute and because they can be chosen to correspond directly to the interests of particular groups of pupils. The problems which arise here are those associated with recording materials, editing them to suit the various requirements, then producing transcripts and exercises. All of this demands a high level of commitment from practitioners. Though these materials may be the most desirable pedagogically, they also pose the greatest number of user problems.

## Concluding note

By way of conclusion to this paper, I want to refer back to the two main aims I had at the outset, firstly to describe a pedagogical framework for the use of video in language teaching, and secondly to examine briefly the question of access to video materials. With regard to the first of these, my overall view of how video should be used can be summarized as follows: it is an effective vehicle for developing second language acquisition by providing input and by organizing opportunities for a wide range of communicative activities in the various language skills. As such it has a crucial contribution to make to language teaching, and one that is not, in my view, as much used as it could be.

The fact that an acquisition-based approach to video is as underused as it is may be associated with some of the points that I raised under my second aim: if video is to be used within an acquisition framework it has to be of a high quality, the right kinds of authentic and semi-authentic materials need to be available, teacher supports are required, and possibly above all, there has to be improved access to appropriate hardware for both individual and institutional users. Arranging for all this to happen is no easy task, given the resources that most teachers have at their disposal at present. I hope that it will be possible for us to share views on both these issues - an acquisition-based approach to video and access to materials - in

the course of the rest of today's deliberations.

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